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EMERGENCE ELSEWHERE: THIRD SPACE IN LINDA HOGAN'S *PEOPLE OF THE  
WHALE*

by

JOAN BANEZ

Under the Direction of Gina Caison, PhD

ABSTRACT

This project examines the relationship between transnational Indigeneity and effectuate trauma in Linda Hogan's *People of the Whale* (2008). The novel's protagonist, Thomas Just, endures trauma that emerges from a transnational adoption narrative, which complicates notions of race- and place-based conceptions of selfhood. To analyze Thomas's production of identity, I look to Kevin Bruyneel's *The Third Space of Sovereignty: The Postcolonial Politics of U.S.-Indigenous Relations* (2007) and Mark Jerng's *Claiming Others: Transracial Adoption and National Belonging* (2010). Through these lenses, I interrogate the onto-epistemological boundaries that complicate Thomas's ability to exist in more than one culture and topological community at once. Thomas's identity exists in and of a metaphysical and sociopolitical "elsewhere" that, although is *of* two places, is not confined *in* these physical places and further prevents him from wholly re-integrating into the two communities in which he was once a part.

INDEX WORDS: Adoption, Native American, Heterotopology, Indigenous, Transnationalism,  
Trauma

EMERGENCE ELSEWHERE: THIRD SPACE IN LINDA HOGAN'S *PEOPLE OF THE*  
*WHALE*

by

JOAN BANEZ

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts  
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Georgia State University

2019

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Joan Banez

2019

EMERGENCE ELSEWHERE: THIRD SPACE IN LINDA HOGAN'S *PEOPLE OF THE  
WHALE*

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May 2019

## **DEDICATION**

To the woman who carried me in her belly and the couple who took me in as their own. To the man who chooses daily to be my father. To the families that choose each other.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project could not have been written if I hadn't taken a seminar about contemporary Native American women writers in the spring of 2018. The course, taught by Gina Caison, marked a significant pivot in my studies in literature. Admittedly, it gave me a sense of direction in my relations to place, race, and what emerges between the two. Thank you, Gina, for your fierce intelligence, your precision and honesty, and your consistent support. Without you, I more than likely wouldn't have read the works of Linda Hogan, Mark Jerng, and Kevin Bruyneel together, at the perfect time that I did.

Thank you also to Annie and Steve, who let me live rent-free as a master's student in their home. Thank you to my mother, Lita, whose story I will one day write (although, this project shares a bit of it). Thank you to my siblings Max, Virginie, Sam, Josephine, Andy, and even Casey. To Megan and Marisa for teaching me unconditional love. I also sincerely thank Randy Malamud and Jay Rajiva for their time and care with my project. Undoubtedly, I am thankful for my undergraduate and graduate studies that have fostered my growth throughout my time at Georgia State University. Thank you to those who have guided me along the way: Paul Schmidt, Dan Marshall, Janet Ann Gabler-Hover, Bobby Burns, Mark Noble, Paul Voss, Malinda Snow, W. Crawford Elliott, and Brian Thoms.

Thank you, especially, to LaRue for teaching me not only how to find my voice but also how to write it. And, thank you to my family in the Philippines—the roots we share are the earth from which this project blossomed. *Naalala Kita*.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

“Emergence Elsewhere: Third Space in Linda Hogan’s *People of the Whale*” analyzes productions of Indigenous third space identity that transcend across physical and metaphysical notions of place. In doing so, I look into how postcolonial U.S.–Indigenous history has shaped Native American identity in different spheres: identity changes through interstitial travel, transnational adoption, and by surviving trauma that emerges from the two. This project studies *People of the Whale*, excavating what is visible in order to quantify the weight of what is missing.

My research speculates into identity that is characterized by epistemological and ontological origins that exist elsewhere. Elsewhere, synonymous with a third space, both causes and affects identity throughout the novel. The effects of elsewhere emerge through diffractive trauma, which consequently compounds preexistent factors that shape character identity. Through the subject of trauma, I examine how layers of Indigenous-specific experiences become the palimpsests of identity that rest upon amorphous geographical and sociopolitical territory. I discuss place- and race-based notions of selfhood to contribute to ongoing discourse about how productions of Native American identity can be understood through similar layering dynamics across national boundaries. Identity takes shape in such places, as well as within and around them, even if such places aren’t the traceable location right under one’s feet.

When an identity cultivated abroad compounds histories of grief, recognizability, and a need to survive, identity in itself—as well as its accompanying trauma—persists because of inherent dissonance. When grappling with identity that is not tethered directly to place as we know it, we may find ourselves looking away from the mirror, rather than looking to it. In these

moments, we might find ourselves asking: *Is identity always translatable? Can it interfere? How does it emerge—has it already?*

### 1.1 Emerging Elsewhere: Linda Hogan's *People of the Whale*

Through a diffractive, transdisciplinary approach, my research grapples with the complexity that accompanies studies of Indigenous identity in regard to race- and place-based qualifications of selfhood. I examine Linda Hogan's *People of the Whale* (2008) as a contemporary Indigenous text that invites the use of U.S.–Indigenous history, transnational adoption narratives, and identity politics together to conduct a detailed character analysis of its protagonist. To analyze Thomas Just as member of two ostensibly mutually exclusive Indigenous communities throughout the novel, I look to *The Third Space of Sovereignty: The Postcolonial Politics of U.S.–Indigenous Relations* (2007) by Kevin Bruyneel and *Claiming Others: Transracial Adoption and National Belonging* (2010) by Mark Jerng. My character analysis of Thomas centers around the onto-epistemological entanglements<sup>1</sup> emergent from conflicting productions of identity, one of the novel's primary tensions. As a member of the fictional A'atsika tribe that resides in a Pacific Northwest community called Dark River,<sup>2</sup> and later, as a soldier in the Vietnam War, Thomas's Indigenous identity takes shape through acts of transit that situate him "elsewhere." It is in his attempts to renounce and later (re)integrate<sup>3</sup> into his two

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<sup>1</sup> Barad further posits in *Meeting the Universe Halfway* that identifying ontology and epistemology as inextricably linked is characteristic of diffractive methodologies. By implicating the two together as *onto-epistem-ology* Barad asserts, "Practices of knowing and being are not isolable; they are mutually implicated. We don't obtain knowledge by standing outside the world; we know because we are *of* the world. We are part of the world in its differential becoming" (185).

<sup>2</sup> *People of the Whale* does not specify a real location in which Dark River exists. However, the novel alludes to the Makah and the Nuuchah-nulth tribes, who reside in Washington and the west coast of Vancouver Island, respectively.

<sup>3</sup> The prefix "re" is in parenthesis to note how while Thomas attempts to reintegrate into Dark River, emphasizing a return to the community, he also seemingly integrates into the community after the war, as if his adopted identity had no previous history in Dark River. This point will be expanded upon in Chapter 2.

Indigenous communities that my research examines Thomas's personal relationships (and consequent political implications) within and throughout the United States and abroad.

Thomas's turbulent relationships are the centers from which his character's trauma emerges. This trauma is prompted from a transnational adoption narrative that Thomas himself also adopts by means of survivance.<sup>4</sup> Thomas's adopted transnational narrative identity is sustained by choice, which compounds Indigenous-specific trauma throughout the novel. I look to Bruyneel's *Third Space of Sovereignty* to explicate productions of Native American identity within the U.S. to explore how geopolitics of foreign-domestic sovereignty shape Indigenous identity.

Although the A'atsika tribe are a fictional people, Hogan aligns fictionalized Indigenous identity with postcolonial political realism that shapes and situates "real" tribes within the United States and U.S.–Indigenous relationships. Hogan uses the word "tribe" at times when discussing characters whose Indigenous communities are in the American Pacific Northwest and South Vietnam. Hogan's use of the word, albeit without tribal specificity, allows me to examine the South Vietnamese village as an Indigenous community.<sup>5</sup> In doing so, the Chickasaw writer illuminates how both real and fictional Native American identity occupies a third space, one that is neither geographically or politically "outside" (independent) or "inside" (dependent) the United States. I argue that Thomas's character represents a microcosm of larger sociopolitics that cannot be sufficiently defined or understood through the spatial limitations of the inside-outside binary, which enables me to further expand upon what Bruyneel notes as how "one sees North American political topography" (xx). Because my discussion of third space is both physical

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<sup>4</sup> *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence* by Gerald Vizenor defines Indigenous survivance as an "active presence" or "consciousness and sense of incontestable presence." Survivance, Vizenor clarifies, is not a singular act of surviving but more over "a practice, not an ideology, dissimulation, or theory" (11).

<sup>5</sup> For specific uses of the word, see *People of the Whale* pp. 37, 167, and 206.

(topological) and metaphysical (regarding identity), I contextualize Thomas's narrative experience as one that simultaneously—and paradoxically—solidifies pervading constructions of Native American sovereignty. Bruyneel posits Indigenous third space as that which is “not confined by dominant political boundaries, that refuse[s] the imposition of boundaries” (25). And although stipulating that this third space is not “unqualified or an unproblematic ideal” (25), *The Third Space of Sovereignty* best facilitates my pursuit of research that discusses liminal space in specific regards to Indigeneity.

## 1.2 Situating Indigeneity Through Diffractive Methodologies

Within the academy, a fundamental understanding of third space often begins with the mirror analogy. The mirror, reflecting that which surrounds it, is characterized as a heterotopian space where the absolutely real and simultaneously unreal emerge.<sup>6</sup> The reflective apparatus situates the mirror itself as static object, not subject, of inquiry and by its very fixed structure displaces the agency of that which *does* the mirroring, elsewhere. Just as a mirror reflects, keeping the subject's reflection at a distance from its mirror image, a mirror analogy for situating Indigenous peoples within U.S.–Indigenous relations consequently also remains fixed, and insufficient. It is from within this reflexive<sup>7</sup> methodology that my research begins and aims to diffract.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> In “Of Other Spaces” Michel Foucault discusses heterotopias as “sort[s] of simultaneously mythic and real contestation[s] of the space in which we live.” Heterotopias exist as “real sites” that are “simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted” and are “outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality” (24).

<sup>7</sup> *Reflexivity*, rather than *reflectivity* refers to the social theory that the relationship between cause and effect is cyclical. Cause and effect both affect each other, wherein neither cause nor effect can be easily discerned as being the agent which causes or effects. See *The Child in America* by William I. Thomas and Dorothy Swaine Thomas, New York, A. A. Knopf, 1928.

<sup>8</sup> In physics, diffraction (or interference) is characteristic of the overlapping, bending, or spreading of waves. My research aims to utilize and expand upon existing methodologies that identify theoretical frameworks in themselves as dynamic and diffractive by nature, through which the overlap (or superimposition) of critical lenses interact with, inform, and expand upon each other to cultivate robust research.

Diffraction, as described by Donna Haraway,<sup>9</sup> and later expanded upon by feminist scholar and quantum physicist Karen Barad<sup>10</sup> in *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, “proposes diffraction as an alternative to the well-worn metaphor of reflection” (29). Haraway articulates how reflexivity “invites the illusion of essential, fixed position” while diffraction connotes agency founded upon malleability, transformability, and “attends to patterns of difference (qtd. in Barad 29). Though this project does not engage with diffraction as the subject of inquiry in itself, I propose the use of a diffractive methodological alternative to discuss and examine national and transnational Indigeneity in regard to third space. I use diffraction as a concept to further expand upon Indigenous third space discourse as well as a foundation for a transdisciplinary research methodology that unites contemporary Native American literature, critical race theory, and geopolitics. This diffractive framework “involves reading insights through one another in ways that help illuminate differences as they emerge: how different differences get made, what gets excluded, and how those exclusions matter” (Barad 30).

I am careful to avoid the pitfalls of tokenizing or analogizing science studies, and in this case philosophy of physics, into my research within literary studies. Although people are a part of the material world, a person in motion cannot be qualified and thus examined as mere object. Such objectivity excludes histories, biases, and traumas that make us who and what we are. For this reason, I do not discuss Indigenous and Native American people as diffracted bodies, nor

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<sup>9</sup> Feminist scholar Donna Haraway proposes using the notion of diffraction as a metaphor over reflection for rethinking optical third spaces in her essay “The Promises of Monsters.”

<sup>10</sup> In *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, Karen Barad articulates the importance of transdisciplinary research across science studies and the humanities. Barad proposes “agential realism,” a diffractive methodology, that is an “*epistemological-ontological-ethical* framework that provides an understanding of the role of human *and* nonhuman, material *and* discursive, and natural *and* cultural factors in scientific and other social-material practices, thereby moving such considerations beyond the well-word debates that pit constructivism against realism, agency against structure, and idealism against materialism” (26).

examine Indigenous transit<sup>11</sup> as an act characterized by diffractive movement. However, I increasingly find it a compelling endeavor to diffract the critical geographical, sociopolitical, and literary frameworks through which my queries are founded. Principally, this project seeks to expand upon existent discourse of Indigeneity and third to interrogate U.S.–Indigenous relations, transracial adoption, and national belonging at the macro- and microcosmic scales.

Bruyneel’s macrocosmic interpretation of third space in Native American contexts investigates “the active cultural and political life occurring in the interstitial, in-between, neither-nor locations that we commonly refer to as boundaries” (xviii). These “in-between” spaces apply to analyses of space (both physical and liminal), time, and the shaping of national political identity in U.S.–Indigenous relations. Consequently, discussions of Indigenous identity through third space theories necessitate dialogue between the general political and individual personal.

*People of the Whale* demonstrates this dialogue by presenting a Native American protagonist’s journey, whose unique experiences emphasize a narrative of nuanced individuality that exists in a postcolonial world. The novel illuminates an Indigenous identity that foregoes processes of compounded trauma, which begins when Thomas initially enlists in the U.S. Army to fight in the Vietnam War. In doing so, Thomas leaves his wife Ruth Small and his to-be-born-son Marco (although Thomas does not know Ruth is pregnant). Thomas’s return after the war spurs an effectuate cycle of traumatic continuity, which affects loved ones, reputations, and traditions.

Thomas’s return enacts effectuate trauma because he undergoes a series of events that transform his identity during his time abroad. During combat, Thomas abandons his platoon,

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<sup>11</sup> Jodi A. Byrd states in *Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* that “To be in transit is to be active presence in a world of relational movements and countermovements. To be in transit is to exist relationally, multiply” (xvii). I will expand upon Byrd’s concept of transit in Chapter 1.



unable to cope with wartime violence after an ambush for which he is culpable. Thomas then settles into a rural village in South Vietnam. In part by renouncing his American identity, Thomas is immersed into the Indigenous village's community and meets Ma, who becomes the mother of their daughter, Lin. During his time in the village, Thomas adapts to a culture that becomes his own through community inclusion. He then begins to build a life that parallels the one he renounced in Dark River. In doing so, Thomas adopts a narrative that allows him to spatiotemporally displace his Indigenous onto-epistemological beginnings. This act of narrative acquisition demonstrates how adopting a narrative in itself leads to one's onto-epistemological becoming across transnational boundaries.

When Thomas returns to Dark River against his will, after the U.S. Army discovers him at Ma's funeral, the complications that have molded his identity unfold. When Ma is killed in a minefield, Thomas subsequently abandons Lin in South Vietnam, although he later reflects upon having not taken the distinct opportunity to bring her with him to the U.S. when the Army required him to return. Despite the traumatic series of events, the A'atsika community receives Thomas as a war hero. Thomas reemerges in Dark River, praised after being mistakenly pronounced dead during the war, but finds himself incapable of reintegrating into the community because he cannot renounce the onto-epistemological narrative he has adopted. Thomas does not perceive himself a war hero, nor as a paragon of the A'atsika people, and further struggles to reconcile the person he was before his time abroad with the vestiges of the man the A'atsika remember. This results in his isolation from the A'atsika people, the U.S. Army, and the A'atsika wife and child from whom Thomas has estranged himself, each of which can be understood through what Jerng expounds upon in *Claiming Others: Transracial Adoption and National Belonging*.

In *Claiming Others*, Jerng extrapolates upon the mutual inclusiveness of personal-political conceptualizations of personhood. Although none of the characters in *People of the Whale* undergo legalized adoption, grounding my analysis in Jerng's research shows how Thomas "adopts" a narrative identity that emerges from situational, trans-Indigenous nationhood.<sup>12</sup> Whereas Bruyneel speculates about the sociopolitical significance of Indigenous identity with topographical boundaries, Jerng examines liminality within relationships that constitute identity "elsewhere" due to conflicting notions among "familial, national, and racial constructions of community" (xv). Jerng articulates multiple dynamics of transracial adoption, emphasizing adoption practices as reproductions of personhood" (129). Transracial adoption in this sense "represents the negotiation of both intra- and inter-national processes in the making of persons, without collapsing them into a vision that both ignores the traumatic histories before adoption and the racialized forms after adoption" (129). The "intra- and inter-national processes" oppose representation predicated upon an "inside-outside" binary and illuminate "the uneasy process of reconciling the desire to situate oneself in disavowed histories and the need to make claims that are socially legible" (129–130).

Jerng asserts that in order to make socially legible claims of one's production of personhood within transracial adoption matters, the struggle toward identity recognition and integration is comprised of constant acts of inconsistent transference. Recognition, regarding adoptees and their adoptive communities, reveals "two temporalities that overlap but do not necessarily meet in any form of mutuality or reciprocation" (180). This transferal dynamic demonstrates how adoption narratives further complicate and compound identity into a plurality

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<sup>12</sup> Chadwick Allen's *Trans-Indigenous: Methodologies for Global Native Literary Studies* discusses "trans-Indigeneity" as a concept that juxtaposes and compares two or more Indigenous perspectives "'close together'" (xvii) "'with place'" (xviii) to reveal complex and complicated Indigenous relationships at the center.

of ontological-epistemological foci that must learn to coexist together. Often, these processes of recognition and integration, in both political and personal realms, are “asymmetrical, nonreciprocal, and nonsynchronous,” beginning with a “scene of encounter and a later, other moment of emergence” (180).

Thus, with a study of the physical, sociopolitical, and intra/interpersonal perspectives of Indigenous identity and with Native American sovereignty seen through multiple vantage points, my project explores, first, conceptions of “elsewhere” from which this “other moment” emerges. In speculating “elsewhere” as related to physical topography, I expand upon heterotopological<sup>13</sup> notions of recognition and integration to metaphysical interpretations of spatial rhetoric in order to arrive at how *adopted* and *adoptive* narratives reconstitute acts of recognition that hinder (re)integration into communities by subjects of transnational adoption. To clarify a note on terminology, I use the adjective *transnational* rather than Jerng’s use of *transracial* in my analysis of adoption in *People of the Whale* to focus on the novel’s emphasis on identity as related to the familial-nation form.<sup>14</sup>

Through a diffractive theoretical lens, this project considers a question that in itself is sustained by choice: what difference really exists between *adoption* narratives and *adopted* narratives? I posit my queries into Hogan’s *People of the Whale* to study how although none of the characters experience legalized adoption, the novel highlights the dynamics affective narrative identity commonly present in transracial adoption practices. How does transnational adoption elucidate how Indigenous heterotopological identity contributes to survivance? And, if

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<sup>13</sup> Heterotopology is the study of places that are simultaneously, absolutely real and unreal and that are not singular point-places. It is the study of places that implicate the “indefinitely slowed down” movement between two or more static and physically identifiable places. See note 5.

<sup>14</sup> In *Claiming Others: Transracial Adoption and National Belonging*, Jerng identifies how “the family is a microcosm of the nation” and how “imagining the nation as a racially homogenous group, or theorizing families as the basis for states, political discourses and narratives of the nation reiterate the metaphorical and analogical relationships among family, nation, and race” (xvi–xvii).

conflicting race-based and nation-based notions of selfhood inhibit Thomas's (re)integration into the communities in which he identifies, how does the fact that Thomas is not adopted but rather practices an adopted narrative shaped by two different communities reconstitute the novel's parameters toward conflict resolution?

I argue that because Thomas's trauma emerges from an inability to reconcile place-based and nation-based notions of identity together, the effectuate trauma that is characteristic of Thomas's experiences obstructs the novel's attempt at resolution through character redemption or resurgence because trauma is not of the same causal origin. Tracing his transit throughout the novel, Thomas's production of selfhood can be understood through characteristics of heterotopology that demonstrate how he is a person who exists "elsewhere" during his numerous relocations. Thomas physically occupies "elsewhere" when virtually unidentifiable by Ruth, Marco, and Lin and *becomes* elsewhere as a person whose narrative of adopted heterotopological identity makes him socially and emotionally inaccessible.

In exploring this "elsewhere," my research intends to bring Indigenous texts to the fore as the subjects—never mere objects—of scholarly study. Thomas Just's relocation from one Indigenous community to another reveals how perpetual motion cultivates identity upon trauma that emerges from a transnational adoption narrative. It is here—in the space between nations and between *buried* and *becoming*—that identity emerges. Thomas's identity exists in a physical and sociopolitical "elsewhere" that, although it is *of* two places, is not confined *in* these places and further prevents him from wholly re-integrating into a community in which he was once a part. To this, I propose, how do we study identity and trauma that expand far beyond the spaces that initially contained them? And if, in this liminal space, we grasp something, does it take first feeling what's around us to understand their very shape?



## 2 CHAPTER 1: TRANS-INDIGENOUS: TRAUMA, TRANSIT, AND TRANSFERENCE

Third space in *People of the Whale* emerges from transit—interstitial motion—between two Indigenous communities. In this sense, third space is both the act of transit and the diffracted onto-epistemology that results from it. The novel’s Native American protagonist, Thomas Just, undergoes a change in identity that does not manifest in a hybridizing or “splitting” of himself between cultures. Rather, Thomas undergoes a transformation within a third space that later renders him inaccessible to a community he once called home. He becomes estranged from the relationships that had previously defined him and struggles to value the histories, traditions, and knowledge ways that irrevocably bind him to his place of origin. Thomas’s changed identity is the product of traversing a third space that is constituted by movement itself. Neither “here” nor “there,” his identity becomes a superimposed center where post-traumatic stress disorder, a cycle of abandonment, and a narrative of self-condemnation interfere. This onto-epistemological overlap creates an “elsewhere” that has no definite “boundaries.”

This chapter explores how this third space identity can be as inaccessible as a third space itself. *People of the Whale* conveys how transnational transit diffracts originally singular conceptions of identity, decentering its origins. The novel primarily takes place in two locations: the American Pacific Northwest and South Vietnam. My character analysis of Thomas denotes how causal and effectuate trauma are byproducts of his departure to Vietnam and return to Dark River. I acknowledge causal and effectuate trauma as third space characteristics that manifest in inter- and intra-personal phenomena. Thomas’s initial absence catalyzes a series of traumas that trouble the lives of his estranged wife and son, Ruth Small and Marco Polo.

After serving his time in the Vietnam War, Thomas chooses to begin a second life with Ma, who gives birth to their daughter, Lin; however, when he returns to Dark River, he renounces all connections to his life in South Vietnam, save his wartime trauma. Thomas's respective absences initially cause trauma to his families; returning to Dark River compounds these traumas, as he resurfaces into a community that accepts him, while he does not willingly adjust back to his previous life there. Juxtaposing the consequences of Thomas's leaving and attempts to return to both families implies a change in identity that prevents him from existing in either fully. To highlight these exclusionary repercussions, I examine the specifics of the third space in which Thomas cultivates these changes, asking how and why the changes persist beyond their spatial origins.

To examine non-finite boundaries, I look to Kevin Bruyneel's *Third Space of Sovereignty*, which expands upon Homi K. Bhabha's conception of third space in an attempt to situate Indigeneity within and beyond U.S. borders. Bhabha states that a third space "represents both the general conditions of a language and the specific implication of the utterance in a performative and institutional strategy of which it cannot 'in itself' be conscious (36). Third space is tethered to a language of boundaries. It is the third space, "though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized, and read anew" (37).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> In *The Location of Culture* (1994), Homi K. Bhabha further describes the third space dynamic: "The pronominal I of the proposition cannot be made to address—in its own words—the subject of enunciation, for this is not personable, but remains a spatial relation within the schemata and strategies of discourse. The meaning of the utterance is quite literally neither the one nor the other. This ambivalence is emphasized when we realize that there is no way that the content of the proposition will reveal the structure of positionality" (36). Bhabha asserts that "The intervention of the Third Space of enunciation, which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process, destroys this mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is customarily revealed as an integrated, open, expanding code (37).

U.S.–Indigenous relations represent a macrocosmic example of the act of locating and defining Indigenous third space narratives: in this case, those including and similar to Thomas Just’s. Although Thomas’s trauma is a result of transnational transit *across* rather than *within* domestic U.S. borders, defining and locating Thomas’s identity hinges upon similar constitutive language. I utilize Bruyneel’s methodology of locating Indigenous nations and long-contested debates of sovereignty to articulate an Indigenous-specific third space experience at the national and transnational level. Through discussing what constitutes a nation and what solidifies nationhood, I apply conceptions of sovereignty from large-scale political purview to small-scale individual.

Bruyneel states that Indigenous tribes are neither locationally classified as “foreign Nations” or “several states” within U.S. geopolitical boundaries. What constitutes an Indigenous nation<sup>16</sup> within the U.S. is that “neither location sufficiently reveals the political status of Indigenous tribes and nations in the American political setting” (11). Even more so, nationhood, as Craig Womack states, is itself an intermingling of politics, imagination, and spirituality. It encompasses ongoing treaty relationships with the U.S. government as well as how economic developments and other practices affect Native American sovereignty.<sup>17</sup> Referencing Phillip Deere, Womack warns about the link between loss of culture and loss of sovereignty, astutely

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<sup>16</sup> Benedict Anderson theorizes that nations are socially constructed in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983). Anderson writes that a nation is limited, sovereign, and imagined as community. Moreover, a nation is “conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible . . . for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings.” A nation is inescapably confronted with cultural pluralism yet takes into account each ontological claim and territorial stretch of other nations. A nation dreams of being free; the gage and emblem of this freedom is the sovereign state (7).

<sup>17</sup> This articulation of nationhood is excerpted from *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism* (1999) by Craig Womack. *Red on Red* elaborates upon the significance of nationhood to Native American communities, in special regard to nationalist themes in Indigenous literature that serve as a form Indigenous literary resistance. Nationhood is further affected by imagination in the way that citizens of tribal nations perceive their cultural and political identity, recognizing spiritual practices, since culture is a part of what gives people an understanding of their uniqueness, their difference, from other nations of people (60).



observing that being recognized as a nation requires an ongoing living culture.<sup>18</sup> Nationhood, then, connotes respective characteristics of community belonging that emphasize *what* does the recognizing, or more precisely, *who*.

Further, the definitional boundaries that recognize a nation within these parameters stipulate how Indigenous tribes within the U.S. are, as Bruyneel writes, “*domestic to the United States in a foreign sense*” (190, emphasis in original). This phrase inherently defies binaristic identifiers and signals a much-needed shift away from linguistic barriers related to Indigenous sovereignty. Bruyneel discusses the act of locating liminality by examining geopolitical boundaries that require Indigenous nations to seek sovereignty through exercising independence and autonomy without guarantee of sovereign recognition. Boundaries in this context “are more than just barriers.” Instead, “they are sites of co-constitutive interaction among groups, governments, nations, and states where competing notions of political time, political space, and political identity shape the U.S.–Indigenous relationship” (xix). Such interaction suggests how agency is borne from the tension between conflicting notions of community and spatio-temporal referents.

Thomas’s trauma depends upon recognizability that can be transferred through a dialectic, which his emotional inaccessibility does not allow. Through this lens, we can see how interstitial existence prevents recognition as a sovereign body at the microcosmic level. Thomas King states that “Sovereignty, by definition, is a supreme and unrestricted authority. However, sovereignty in practice, as a functional form of governance, is never an absolute condition” (25). To be a sovereign—through nationhood or personhood—also relies upon a dialectic of acts of recognition that validate to the outside. The recognition of sovereignty relies upon visibility that

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid. p. 56.

further connotes validity. And validation is commonly constituted by confirmations of the real, the point-place specific, the topologically identifiable.

When returning to Dark River, Thomas believes “he was in a different world. He was from a different world.” He says that “It was a long distance between the two. He thought it would never be crossed” (46–47). To state he “was in” and “was from” a different world demonstrates how Thomas’s onto-epistemological center experiences a shift away from its original topographical origins. And whether the difference occurs due to a change in identity or a change in the community itself, he experiences a spatio-temporal disconnect that problematizes his recognition within the nation. Further, the ambiguous statement “it was a long distance between the two” does not identify which specific places constitute “the two.” This asserts that Thomas cannot locate and thus identify with his origins within Dark River because transit superimposed them. Thomas lacks sovereign recognition, which creates barriers to self-redemption and plot resolution.

I use the prefix *trans-* to articulate transit between two Indigenous communities. Thomas’s transnational adoption narrative is borne out of acts of transit, and it is through his perpetual motion that I analyze how transferal dynamics of the familial-nation form affect identity. Before articulating the nuances of the transnational adoption narrative, I first examine the effects of transnational transit. *People of the Whale* exemplifies how a third space diffracts positionality with regard to place as Thomas’s experiences in singular, topographically identifiable locations are heavily influenced by an inherent connection to place established elsewhere, either across physical or national boundaries.

Chadwick Allen writes about how the prefix *trans-* delineates the terminological intricacies of discussing Indigenous literature in a global perspective. Allen focuses on *who* and

*what* and *where* lie at the perspectival center of Indigenous literary scholarship. He writes that *trans*-Indigeneity conducts a more “precise analysis of self-representation” that functions through an “Indigenous-to-Indigenous comparison” (xiv). This methodological approach places hegemonic settler culture to the periphery by reshaping the very language we use to identify relationships between Indigenous people at the global perspective.<sup>19</sup> *Trans*-Indigeneity makes Indigenous-specific epistemologies and literatures visible as a means to articulate histories and positionalities before and beyond European contact. Beginning with the term *and*, then adjusting to *comparative*, Allen identifies the implications behind the two words. Both convey an interconnection between Indigenous people across boundaries. It is within this interconnection that tension arises: *inter* implies a relational dynamic that examines subjects against each other. Allen then proposes the prefix *trans*- to acknowledge the *intra*connection among Indigenous people as a means to examine relationships that are not only in conversation with each other but through each other.<sup>20</sup> This approach uses juxtaposition to unite cultures and geographies close together, and by consequence also brings “diverse texts close together” (xviii) across various contexts and traditions.

Shari Huhndorf explores the concept of transnationalism using similar juxtapositional language. Huhndorf identifies Indigenous transnationalism as “alliances among tribes and the

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<sup>19</sup> In *Red on Red*, Craig Womack asserts the value of Indigenous-specific discourse by Indigenous communities through Indigenous theory and literature: “Native perspectives have to do with allowing Indian people to speak for themselves, that is to say, with prioritizing native voices. Those voices may vary in quality, but they rise out of a historical reality wherein Native people have been excluded from discourse concerning their own cultures, and Indian people must be, ultimately will be, heard” (4-5).

<sup>20</sup> Chadwick Allen, Shari Huhndorf, and Craig Womack emphasize how *trans*-Indigenous relationships imbue literary conversations. Womack cites Howard Adams, a Métis scholar and activist, in *Red on Red*: “Without indigenous consciousness, Indians, Métis, and Inuit peoples’ only claim to Aboriginality is race and heritage. That is not enough to achieve true liberation. To accomplish self-determination, we need more than racial pride. We must have Aboriginal nationalism, an understanding of the state’s capitalist ideology and its oppression, and, ultimately, a counter-consciousness” (5). Adams does not group Indians, Métis, and Inuit people together as the same community, per say, but rather notes the importance of nationalist practices that only Indigenous or Aboriginal peoples can harness as a form of resistance. Womack, who is of Creek-Cherokee ancestry, citing Adams (who speaks about Indigenous people across various boundaries) is an example of *trans*-Indigeneity in literary scholarship.

social structures and practices that transcend their boundaries, as well as processes on a global scale such as colonialism and capitalism” (2). Expanding on the arbitrary nature of colonial boundaries, Huhndorf explains how “Indigenous nationalisms have roots in the pre-contact autonomy of Native communities” (7). Yet while the “transnational Indigenous movement is largely bound to local, even national, concerns, it brings to the fore issues that extend beyond the tribal” (13). Examining Native literature by looking at a novel’s “spatial and conceptual center” (15) foregrounds interconnected relationships among Indigenous communities across geographic and political boundaries. Such a methodological approach highlights the importance of studying how juxtapositions signify an interconnectivity within multiple places.

Through juxtaposing two Indigenous communities, *People of the Whale* demonstrates how Thomas Just’s trauma does not emerge from a singular point-place origin. Rather, this trauma occurs from transnational transit that further complicates the already difficult act of situating Indigenous sovereignty within U.S.–Indigenous geopolitics. Hogan de-centers and *re-centers* origins of character trauma from a topographically locatable point-place, which is singular and static, to a third space, which is multiple and effectuate. Thomas begins to exist liminally through being in constant motion, and he develops an identity characterized by a superimposition of traumas whose origins are multiple. Thomas’s identity, however, does not become hybridized. Instead, what results from transit is a narrative of identity that is wholly reconstructed and recast elsewhere. This notion of compounded identity brings together an amalgamation of narratives that do not grant Thomas full access to either Indigenous community once his transit ends. Thomas’s interstitial identity depends upon being in a constant state of motion, which implicates how settling into a state of rest inevitably affects those around him. Thomas’s transit between two distinct point-places cultivates a third identity that although is *of*

two places, is not confined *in* these physical places and further prevents him from wholly (re)integrating into the two communities in which he was once a part.<sup>21</sup>

Although there is value in studying how very real physical and cultural boundaries can (re)constitute onto-epistemological foci, I do not mean to concretize identity as a physically identifiable object floating in the ether. Yet, in having established two lives and unable to actively participate in either fully, Thomas operates in an in-between that is informed by two communities that are mutually exclusive. In this space, he is neither “insider” or “outsider” and is simultaneously alive and dead. Because Thomas’s transit occurs between two mutually exclusive places, his identity begins to embody a third space, which is both unlocatable and inaccessible due to the parameters that constitute it. As places can exist in and of motion as they can exist in and of states of being, place within the novel is not defined solely by topography. However, the notion that an Indigenous character who exists elsewhere (by being locationally unidentifiable) can *become* elsewhere requires an understanding of how hegemonic sociopolitics have and continue to situate Indigenous identity within the U.S. and abroad. *People of the Whale* portrays third space identity that is sustained by the supposition that the two worlds of Dark River and South Vietnam—the past and the present, the static and the kinetic—for some time, will not touch.

Through the conditionality of such boundaries, the novel’s origins of trauma are multiple and beget continuity. Thomas forgoes transit that can be fundamentally understood through Jodi

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<sup>21</sup> In *Writing Home: Indigenous Narratives of Resistance* (2008), Michael D. Wilson writes that in “[Indigenous] narratives of conflict, success for characters often depends on their ability to overcome psychological or social conflict and then to (re)integrate themselves into a tribal world (rarely, if ever, into the non-Indian world” (xi). Such “narratives of conflict result in failure when protagonists are unable to envision their identities in either indigenous or nonindigenous societies (the tragic India ‘caught between two worlds’), a result of either their own personal failings or destructive forces beyond their control” (xi). Further, novels such as *People of the Whale* “not only expose the narrative alibis for colonial power, they also reflect the complex, internal tensions within postcolonial societies through the use of innovative narrative structures” (xvi).

A. Byrd's *Transit of Empire*, which identifies transit with instability, death, and the impossibilities of grief (xv). Thomas's specific case portrays how interstitial motion shapes his identity, which consequently influences the people and places he encounters. Byrd argues that transit "evokes the cacophony of traffic jams and exhaust fumes of the everyday work day," further implying "fluidity, noise, and instability" (xv). Traffic imbues cacophony through sonic dissonance, and Thomas's transit demonstrates cacophony by functioning as the novel's central cause of conflict. Byrd illuminates Thomas's movement between, across, and within boundaries because of the characteristic of cacophony.<sup>22</sup> To describe Thomas's trauma as cacophonous elucidates that the consequences of transit manifest in his relationships by compounding preexistent traumas. Cacophonous trauma is agentic in nature and emerges from the space between two mappable places. Thomas's return to Dark River results in a disarray of static and agentic traumas that are compounded by his relocation. Moreover, Ruth and Lin's static and ontologically locatable traumas contrast with Thomas's, which are both causal and effectuate.

Thomas's constant motion is like movement in traffic. As Thomas's transit indicates constant motion, I constitute Ruth and Lin as nodal points. The two function as points of rest, convergence, divergence. As nodal points, Thomas's respective interactions with them are identifiable point-places where agentic continuity emerges. Their traumas originate from Thomas's abandonment and become traumatically effectuate when they reunite with him. Where Thomas's absence begets trauma through Ruth's and Lin's inability to locate him, his later presence incites cacophonous trauma through emotional inaccessibility. Such inaccessibility displaces knowledge elsewhere and renders their interactions with Thomas transferentially

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<sup>22</sup> Jodi A. Byrd in *Transit of Empire* discusses how Indigenous transit evokes cacophony or conflicting pluralities in "Indianness," produced through U.S. colonialism and imperialism domestically and abroad, often coercing struggles for social justice with settler colonialism.

ineffective and insufficient. These points of rest compound Byrd's notion of ungrievability by materializing what was once unlocatable only to make the presently identifiable still partially unintelligible.

Ruth and Lin's resulting trauma exists "liminally in the ungrievable spaces of suspicion and unintelligibility" (Byrd xv). Byrd's assertion that transit connotes what is *ungrievable* does not mean that something is not worth grieving. Moreover, ungrievability signifies an inability to grieve for that which cannot be located and identified through processes of understanding. The effectuate nature of Thomas's cacophonous trauma is attributively ungrievable for Ruth and Lin because of an inability to trace the origins from which their traumas initially emerge. Their traumatic experiences are foundationally rooted in Thomas's oscillating presence in their lives: Thomas returns to Dark River after leaving Ruth and Marco for the war, later abandoning Lin in Vietnam.

Due to post-traumatic stress disorder and an adopted narrative of self-condemnation acquired from wartime experience, Thomas withholds the necessary information Ruth needs to contextualize his absence. By renouncing all contact with her while abroad, Thomas is unlocatable and thus ungrievable. Yet when the U.S. Army later notifies Ruth of Thomas's MIA status and ostensible death, her visit from Sergeant Green signifies Ruth's shift from unintelligibility and ungrievability to discernment and grievability. He takes "something out of his pocket" and hands it to Ruth's mother, leaving the two with "a dog tag, a single one" (35). During this exchange, Ruth receives material proof that validates Thomas's death. Although Thomas's precise location is still unknown, the dog tag signifies an absolute—death—that is made grievable. And in response, Ruth is an "armload of grief" (37) in her mother's embrace. Yet, she is still suspicious of the "absoluteness" of the situation. Although Thomas is not

physically present, cacophonous trauma ensues when Ruth receives tangible proof that merely signifies absolute death.

The dog tag provokes an immediate reaction of grief associated with tangible locatability. However, what follows is a reverberation of denial. The dog tag represents death while Thomas himself, dead or alive, exists elsewhere. Ruth is convinced that Thomas is elsewhere, existing as Byrd states as “relationally, multiply” (xvii). Thomas is both nowhere (gone, dead), but also *somewhere*: untraceable, yet alive. At times, Ruth imagines that Thomas is somewhere, sharing food with his ancestors, or fishing for them and not for earth people (37). She even dreams of Thomas “with a little girl on his lap like a spirit child” (38). Ruth’s inclinations blur the lines between the “real” and the spiritual. Clairvoyance allows her to tether her hopes of Thomas’s survival to things beyond the material world. Her visions encapsulate what Byrd identifies to be “multiple subjectivities” (Byrd xxi). However, as they provide some consolation to Ruth, the visions also exemplify “subjugations put into motion and made to move through notions of injury, grievance, and grievability” (Byrd xxi) that spur a perpetual and, perhaps, reciprocal wielding of trauma.

Thomas, however, is not dead, despite what the dog tag signifies. And once Thomas returns to Dark River, Ruth struggles to reconcile conflicting perspectives of him from their past relationship with the person he has become after transit. Ruth discerns Thomas’s onto-epistemological changes, noticing that “He [is] no longer Thomas.” Ruth feels she is “speaking to someone else, a stranger. A man with secrets, one whose life was unknown or injured, and who’d forgotten his world before” (76). Secrecy and inaccessibility characterize their relationship, especially in regard to Thomas’s estranged relationship to Marco. Ruth internalizes Thomas’s insensitivity and negligence toward their broken family, which reaches its peak when



Marco dies during an A'atsika whale hunt gone awry.<sup>23</sup> Ruth's long-awaited reunion with Thomas is not what "she had ever dreamed; his love for her had ended" (Hogan 76), and although "she was an anchor," at that moment, she "knew it had an end, a stopping place" (76). It doesn't take Thomas physically colliding with Ruth for her to feel "herself sinking" from a "pain in her heart that almost [makes] her double over and fall to the floor" (76). Ruth not only experiences compounded static trauma; she also notices the reverberation of Thomas's trauma upon himself when she "saw in his face, in the way he held his body, like a bow without a string, that something terrible had happened to him those years [abroad], that this was terrible, too, with unforeseen consequences, more than he even knew until he became a part of it" (Hogan 92).

Similarly, Thomas abandons Lin when he is discovered by the U.S. Army. Orphaned, Lin flees to Ho Chi Minh City, where she is taken in by a Vietnamese couple who become her pseudo-parents. After some searching, Lin tracks Thomas down and travels to Dark River, where she encounters Ruth. Ruth assists Lin's efforts, taking her in as her own, but her efforts prove futile when attempting to effectively help Lin (re)connect with Thomas. When they visit him, Lin still does not know that he "was a deserter" during the war, observing, too, that "he does not look kind. He does not look like he saved a soul in the world, not even his own" (225). Witnessing the exchange, Ruth chastises Thomas for his silence and lack of reciprocity. "He says nothing" and looks "old and tired and sad," (225) to which Ruth responds, "'I will never forgive you for this. I can forgive you for all your other things. Your rudeness. Your lying around feeling sorry for yourself. But you pull yourself together and treat your daughter like a human being!'" (226). Ruth continues, asking, "'Where's your heart? Where is your soul?'" before slamming the

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<sup>23</sup> In an attempt to reintegrate into the A'atsika tribe, Thomas participates in a sacred whale hunt. During the hunt, Thomas experiences PTSD flashbacks that results in gunfire. Chaos ensues, and in the midst of it, Marco is killed. This event explicitly represents Thomas's difficulty and ostensible inability to integrate back into the Dark River community. I will expand upon this event, among others related to reintegration, in Chapter 2.

door. By asking “where,” Ruth conveys how Thomas’s apparent emotional inaccessibility leaves the interaction moot. Figuratively, the questions express Ruth’s exasperation at Thomas’s disconnect with Lin. Literally, the questions demonstrate how Ruth seeks to locate and understand the origin and cause of Thomas’s traumas, which evade effective transferential interaction. Even though Thomas is physically locatable, right in front of her, she cannot reach him.

This exchange illuminates how Thomas’s emotional inaccessibility becomes the equivalent to his previous topographic unlocatability. As a survivance mechanism, emotional inaccessibility establishes an identity that is later compounded by a narrative of self-condemnation. Thomas does not communicate his sentiments of self-loathing to anyone, but the self-condemnation narrative nonetheless affects his relationships with Ruth, Lin, and the A’atsika people. The narrative, a product of compounded wartime experience with a temporary interstitial existence between two trans-Indigenous communities, essentially leads to Thomas’s isolation. The self-condemnation narrative fortifies a liminal boundary due to guilt and self-hatred that emerge from a perpetual cycle of abandonment. This is unique because the complications of Thomas’s identity aren’t due to cultural hybridity. Instead, his identity undergoes transformation due to superimpositions of traumatic experiences that build upon each other to compound self-loathing and forced isolation.

When reflecting upon his exit from Vietnam, Thomas “regrets leaving his daughter, Lin. He still sees her bony knees and skinny legs as she ran toward the helicopter toward him, crying. He had never returned for her” (136). The motif of abandonment throughout the novel emphasizes the traumatic compoundedness not only for Ruth and Lin but also for Thomas himself. Underlying regret toward abandonment perpetuates a cycle of itself:

All he could think of was his own grief about leaving [Vietnam]. He is still in grief. He could have said, *She's my daughter*, and taken her. He thinks about what he had left her to, if she was alive, the life he could have given her. . . . He cries out for Song, the old man in the village, and for Lin, and he calls out for Ruth. Then for Marco. Saying his name over and over. He cries out for all that is no more, and it is so much. (136, emphasis in original)

However, as insidious as the cycle of trauma is, Thomas still “doesn’t want to see. Or be seen.” He even “wants to disappear” (113). Thomas’s urge to keep moving in a state of unrest fortifies a third space that allows him to exist not in spite of but *because* of isolation. To be identifiably sovereign necessitates transference—transparency among equal independents. Thomas experiences extreme difficulty with the process of reintegrating into Dark River, as he can neither fully isolate himself from nor identify with the A’atsika people. After having “spent all these years living in a fog,” Thomas realizes there “are no clear lines between evil and good. He is both” (136). He establishes an identity that inherently superimposes the topographical and onto-epistemological boundaries which have shaped him, and “this is the slow dawn of his knowing” (136).

As I have discussed, when Thomas “slows down” upon returning to Dark River, interstitial agency begins to emerge through nodal points of cacophonous trauma. Thomas’s respective interactions with Ruth, Marco, and Lin result in disappointment; while his loved ones attempt to (re)kindle relationships with him, Thomas desires isolation. Agency takes shape from transit to traumatic transference and results in a constant need to displace agency elsewhere. In other words, Thomas struggles with an inherent desire to remain in motion within circumstances that instead require him to be present in the places he occupies. This displacement proves futile

and suggests isolation as a sole, problematic solution. In order to familiarize his experience in transit once settling back into the A'atsika community, Thomas actively secludes himself from all outside communication. He proceeds to build a wall around his house, as “the only earthly connection he felt to anything was the walking away from everything” (46). Thomas builds a physical boundary around his grandfather’s old house, where he chooses to reside. Building boundaries, physical or otherwise, characterizes his “his third life” (47). The physical wall supplements an impression of unlocatability that Thomas had once sustained through being in constant motion.

However, this idea of a “third life” does not begin after Thomas returns to the American Pacific Northwest. Thomas’s “third life” is his transnational transit as much as it is his return to his birthplace. Although the “stages” from transit to (re)integration appear circumstantially different, this argument holds because the consequences of onto-epistemological superimposition sustain similar manifestations of agentic isolation. Thomas “considers the wall he has built. Is it a haven? No. Is it protection from the wind? No. He hates himself too much to seek protection” (114). The wall serves the purpose of containing rather than protecting what exists within it. However, Thomas continues, “it is to keep dreams from crossing the ocean and coming to him” (114). This is a defining statement of Thomas’s reflection upon his intentions to live in isolation. The thought of “dreams crossing the ocean” demonstrates how Thomas’s “third life” can outwardly affect others who have static, place-based traumas.

The causal *and* effectuate nature of Thomas’s third space existence theorizes how “something is there” in the space where “there is a boundary between self and self that is crossed only in a world like this” (Hogan 180). This third space world blurs the lines between *past* and *present*, *before* war and *after*, and the nuanced differences between seemingly parallel lives

established across Indigenous boundaries. The only distinct characteristic about this third space is not where boundaries are identified but instead how these boundaries compound upon each other and result in a collision of traumatic experiences. Third space boundaries, Thomas considers, are “shadow-covered realms” (180). And in them, “a person watches himself when he is not himself” (180). This space is both one which we can look *to* and see *through*. Yet, we must ask, which of Thomas’s identities is recognized? What sustains this recognition? How does Thomas adapt within this liminal space? And what must Thomas adopt in order to become visible if conflicting notions of selfhood prevent (re)integration into the communities which he was once a part?

### **3 CHAPTER 2: ADAPTING THE TRANSNATIONAL ADOPTION NARRATIVE**

When thinking of the word “adoption,” one might begin by first imagining a family. This family participates in a process that results in the taking-in of another person, usually a minor, as their own. The adoptee is inculcated to the family’s culture and is situated as an equal within the familial-nation form. Above all, the adoptee is recognized as family, and this recognition is notarized by documents that validate the relationship. The adoption narrative I examine in *People of the Whale* is not this idea of the universal adoption narrative. Each narrative, as much as each adoptee, is unlike one another in specifics. The act of “adopting” is not reserved only for families who look elsewhere to include. As one progresses throughout life, one may adopt customs, belief systems, norms, and even mannerisms. Adoption in this sense can be understood as a palimpsestic process of acquiring. It is adapting at its heart.

My personal history encourages me to believe that the connection I identify between the words “adapt” and “adopt” does not emerge from mere conjecture. In 1990, my mother, Lita, initially left the Philippines to find work in Hong Kong. The same year, Annie and Steve, a white

Minnesotan couple who had moved there for work, were in search of a caregiver for their children. The day Lita met Annie and Steve was the day she moved into their home. After a single brief interview, they found her to be a perfect fit. Lita lived with and worked for the family for three years, until Steve's job at UPS required them to move back to the United States. As Annie and Steve prepared for the move, they also prepared documents that would allow my mother to come with them. They would adopt her into their family.

The documents, however, were for a work permit and a visa that would allow my mother legal entry into the United States for an extended period—not adoption papers. Lita was also twenty-seven at the time, which would have rendered her ineligible for legal adoption. Nonetheless, she soon became a pseudo-daughter to Annie and Steve, although she continued to work for them until 1995, when I was born. Lita and I lived in Annie and Steve's house together as an un-nuclear family, while I had never met my biological father. I have still yet to meet him, but I never thought to think much of it as a child, as I had an abundance of parental figures to look up to. I gained another parent, though, when I was seven. Lita married Mike, the man who raised me and legally adopted me a few months before I turned eighteen.

It was not until recently that I've thought much about the papers that notarized Mike's last name to follow the one ascribed to me at birth. Rather, I identify the moment that Annie and Steve recognized Lita as family as the beginning of an adoption narrative. This narrative persists today because they continue to choose to recognize me, too. This is the family dynamic that has informed my perspective of what family looks like, and how I've come to learn what the word means to me.

However, part of this perceived normalcy is the telling of what once felt like natural disclaimers to the outside world to explain our eccentricity. To date, when Annie and Steve host

dinner parties, their friends, guests in the home they own and in which I live rent-free as a master's student, often ask me what relationship I have to them—if they'd adopted me. To this, I say, "It's complicated" and that my explanation would warrant a bit more time than their interest might be willing to give. Yet on the off chance they hear my mother and I both call Annie and Steve "Mom" and "Dad," they stop and listen.

First, I tell the guests that my mother and I are not, in fact, sisters, but that when Annie and Steve quickly adopted her into their family in Hong Kong, they asked that she call them "Mom" and "Dad" rather than "Ma'am" and "Sir," and by "adopted," they treated Lita like a daughter. I tell the friends how I also call Annie and Steve "Mom" and "Dad" because, to some degree, I mimic my mother, who's acted like a big sister to their children—siblings to whom I've been a baby sister.

But what I do not tell them is that gatherings such as these have allowed me to see myself outside of myself as I grew older. Getting up from the table, clearing my plate and theirs—a byproduct of being a server and the muscle memory of the ideal instilled in me that those who don't cook dinner, clean—I notice guests notice me. I can feel them look at me the same way they look at my mother, who is up doing the same. When she washes the dishes, me drying them, I sense that they stop seeing us as sisters, as family to our white counterparts. Perhaps they do not remember the story that took years to make. I feel my face turn a shade of red they cannot see under my almond skin, a visceral reaction to either shame or confusion, from feeling like a guest in my own family. I look at my mother and think that, maybe, the narrative that holds our family together is not recognizable to the guests, who are still seated at the table.

I speculate about the nuanced differences between legal processes of adoption and the conscious (as well as, at times, unconscious) modes of adopting practices because such practices

have the potential to shape our lives, and to become the narratives that articulate our stories. The connection I'm choosing to explore inquires into the inter- and intra-personal consequences of adoptive affect in regard to transnationalism, trauma, and transference. At the crux of the three, and in the overlap with traditional conceptions of adoption, is a process of reconciling a plurality of identities toward recognition. The adoption narrative in *People of the Whale* is similar to mine in that it isn't necessarily easy to identify. Thomas Just does not undergo legal adoption; however, his character demonstrates modes of adaptation that can be understood as acts of adoption, the subject being the adopted narrative in itself. The effects of Thomas's adopted narrative exhibit similar transference conflicts as those experienced by families, including mine, who become involved with transnational adoption. Narratives that begin with a need to adapt, that are sustained by a decision to choose, create their own unique limitations. In Thomas's case, the adopted narrative is acquired by acts of survivance that reconstitute the novel's parameters toward conflict resolution.

While "elsewhere," Thomas cultivates a narrative identity borne out of grief. He sustains a narrative of self-condemnation in order to continue to exist on his own terms and to establish self-recognition even when he is unrecognizable to others. The adopted narrative reifies a perception of himself that conflicts with notions of his identity projected unto him. However, Thomas comes to find that his adopted narrative identity hinders his ability to (re)integrate<sup>24</sup> into

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<sup>24</sup> "Coyote Is not a Metaphor: On Decolonizing, (Re)claiming and (Re)naming Coyote" by Cutcha Risling Baldy (2015) interrogates the "re" prefix. Baldy cites the works of other Indigenous scholars to provide an overview of the prefix's relation to Indigenous studies: "(Re)claiming and (re)naming are two decolonization projects from Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (2012) *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, where she specifically notes that 'A critical aspect of the struggle for self-determination has involved questions relating to our history as indigenous peoples and a critique of how we, as the Other, have been represented or excluded from various accounts'" (29). Risling Baldy acknowledges Smith's work taking into account how "'Every issue has been approached by indigenous peoples with a view to rewriting and rereading our position in history' (29). In her 2013 book *Mark My Words: Native Women Mapping Our Nations*, Mishuana Goeman explains her framing of "re" with parenthesis by stating 'I use the parentheses in (re)mapping deliberately to avoid the pitfalls of recovery or a seeming return of the past to the present' (4). She notes, 'Recovery has a certain saliency in Native American



the A'atsika community. The parenthetical “re” prefix implies Thomas’s return to the community, while also noting how Thomas simultaneously resurges into the society altogether changed, where his return is not synonymous with recognition. When existing in Dark River, albeit in isolation, Thomas occupies Bruyneel’s conception of third space at the microcosmic level: Thomas exists within the community while not being of or “one with” the community. As such, I examine the inter- and intra-personal third-space dynamics within the familial-nation form to argue how Thomas’s adopted narrative identity, catalyzed by grief and survivance, obstructs transferal identity recognition.

Thomas’s return to Dark River with an adopted narrative identity parallels the transferal dynamics that both adoptee and adopter face in traditional conceptions of adoption narratives. Characteristic to Bruyneel, Thomas is neither the agent who solely adopts nor is adopted. However, as Jerng notes, I argue that Thomas’s experience captures “the predicament of the ‘transnational’ in [such] stories” (177). As both adoptee and adopter, Thomas’s adoption narrative “is not so much a loss of original culture as the emphasis on roots would have it, but rather the difficulty of recognition faced by the adoptee at the conjunction of two distinct spatio-temporal frameworks for recognizing personhood” (177). By sustaining a narrative identity cultivated by survivance in a third space, Thomas holds onto that which interferes with his ability to (re)integrate into A’atsika culture. This highlights the fulcrum upon which each adoption narrative rests: the willful and consistent choice to support a narrative that establishes validation and promotes recognition. Yet in Thomas’s case, what he chooses to sustain inhibits rather than fosters an amalgamation of identity toward recognition within the familial-nation form.

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studies; it is appealing to people who have been dispossessed materially and culturally. I contend, however, that it is also our responsibility to interrogate our ever-changing Native epistemologies that frame our understanding of land and our relationships to it and to other peoples” (3).

Thomas is an agent of adoption primarily because of his polarizing process toward identity recognition. Thomas's process takes into account both transracial and transnational notions of belonging dependent on transferal dynamics of recognition that reify a third-space identity. The consequence is a product of a continuous choice to align internal recognition with a narrative identity that Thomas can himself recognize and control. This adopted identity is manufactured—a coping-mechanism-turned-life-stasis. It sustains Thomas's self-recognition while also isolating him from the sociopolitical and geographical spaces he cannot occupy.

Thomas adopts a narrative of self-condemnation not only to cope with post-traumatic stress disorder but also to continue to operate throughout a life in which an outward-facing narrative of his identity does not align with his internal guilt. He is glorified as a military hero by the U.S. Army for his service, which Thomas feels is attributed to a false account of a series of events he was a part of during the Vietnam War. The adopted narrative works as a coping mechanism for a character who believes that self-recognition and self-condemnation are synonymous. And the consequences are two-fold: Thomas's adopted narrative opposes recognition both as a war hero as well as a member of the novel's two Indigenous communities. The narrative identities are lenticular; both cannot be recognized at the same time, and in Thomas's case, the visibility of one narrative depends on the invisibility of another.<sup>25</sup> This lenticular logic implicates how in order to gain recognition, "the right to know one's identity needs to be reformulated in ways that take into account how one attaches oneself to the world" (Jerng 166).

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<sup>25</sup> In *Reconstructing Dixie: Race, Gender, and Nostalgia in the Imagined South* (2003), Tara McPherson elucidates the model of "lenticular logic." Although McPherson writes about the term in regard to the American South, I incorporate McPherson's research to understand how race comes to be figured in dominant cultural narratives that explain the varied formations of a lenticular logic of racial visibility. Put briefly, a lenticular logic is a "monocular logic, a schema by which histories or images that are actually copresent get presented (structurally, ideologically) so that only one can be seen at a time" (7).

Thomas undergoes the processes of adaptation, migration, and death instantaneously while he is identifiably “elsewhere.” These processes reformulate and recenter his onto-epistemological centers. Each of the three vantage points illuminates a triptych of kaleidoscopic fractals, which illustrate a common narrative of ineffective transference within the self and among the familial-nation form. Thomas’s identity is predicated upon acts of identity recognition that persist not in spite of, but because of, conflicting race-based and nation-based notions of selfhood. Such processes are also not easily identifiable until after they happen. Jerng argues that “adoptive relations in this sense are best thought of in terms of psychoanalytic notions of transference,”<sup>26</sup> which suggest both the invention of others on the basis of our past relationships and the acting out of the past in the present in the form of an unconscious repetition” (196). In particular, Ruth and Thomas experience this transferal dynamic. Ruth imposes a narrative upon Thomas that relies on familiarity from their past together. Simultaneously, Thomas renounces the familiar narrative by internalizing one that (pre)serves himself. As Jerng asserts, the lack of narrative reciprocity portrays “the difficulty of two subjects ever meeting on common ground,” as there is no “simple ‘possession’ of the story” (196). Communicated understanding between the two characters is difficult, if not ostensibly impossible because of their lenticular perspectives.

The narratives of identity that Ruth and Thomas respectively perceive conflict because more than one narrative is established for one subject who is neither both fully. Jerng notes that “working toward a story that ‘makes sense’ is always incomplete; the process of retelling a life

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<sup>26</sup> In *Claiming Others: Transracial Adoption and National Belonging* (2010) Mark Jerng notes that “transference” has been used in literature on social cognition to mean the way in which mental representations of (past) significant others are applied to encounters with new persons, thus distorting them through our applications (287). See Susan Andersen, Noah Glassman, Serena Chen, and Steve Cole, “Transference in Social Perception: The Role of Chronic Accessibility in Significant-Other Representations,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 69, no. 1, 1995, pp. 41–57.

depends radically on the constructions of the addressee and the continual resymbolization of the past” (196). Just as Thomas’s trauma affects his relationships, transference depends on a dynamic that has required me to take a step back and ask whether or not what is being communicated to Thomas only would transfer to the person he was before he had adopted a narrative that conflicts with Ruth’s perspective: that is to say, if he had not adopted another identity.

Jerng reifies this point in regard to race: “racial identification is not solely a process of learning racial meanings materialized on the body and in the world” (85). Further, such identification “may change from one moment to the next because it is contingent on to whom one is attached and how one relates to another” (85). To discuss the development of Thomas’s adopted self-condemnation narrative, I argue first that this is a narrative propelled by heterotopology. Thomas initially experiences displacement from the A’atsika community when he embarks on his service in the U.S. Army. His being “elsewhere” isn’t the mere fact that he is a Native American man in temporary transit in another Indigenous community. *Trans-* as Daniel Heath Justice puts it, “implies movement, and movement assumes some measure of positionality, even when it is only metaphorical” (21). Perhaps nothing matters more: Indigenous peoples’ complex and overlapping set of relationships, obligations, legacies, loyalties, and languages that deepen as they extend outward in time and space (21). To which I note, Thomas’s legacies and loyalties undergo cacophonous compounding once he embarks abroad.

By traversing cultural boundaries, Thomas exhibits a pattern of cacophonous trauma that is particularly Indigenous and heterotopological. This can be understood as a diffractive pattern that emerges from a layering of palimpsests (from his Native American identity as Justice iterates) and into a fractal pattern that extends, compounds, and continues patterns of trauma that

emerge from agentic origins. This fractal-like behavior continues due to instances of muscle memory that are triggered by gunfire during the war. Both Thomas's fame and self-condemnation narrative emerge from the attack on his platoon during the Vietnam War, which I will examine in further detail later in this chapter. Thomas initiates a shooting rampage and later disappears into a rural Vietnamese village. When he returns to Dark River, his conscience is haunted by the "faces that emerged like ghosts from the canopy of the jungle and then disappeared back into the trees" (48) and the "faces of the shot men also came to him" (48). With shame, guilt, and an inability to reconcile his actions with the heroic legacy bestowed upon him, Thomas bears the weight of his truth of the military encounter. His isolating guilt and PTSD become almost tangible manifestations of the self-condemnation narrative when "the faces of the alive" also haunt him—"Ruth and the ghost child, Marco" (50).

If adoption is a process of identity production (or, reconstruction), then the practice of survivance marks one of the many revolutions the self undergoes through necessity. Survivance, however, emphasizes how one's unrecognizability is what allows the self, when all else is untethered, to find its grounding. What matters most under these circumstances is the willingness to fortify an existence on one's own terms. This is an existence with terms that substantially change with each decision, consequential positionality, and sheer location. The notion of positionality, so crucial to survivance, also resonates with contemporary experiences of travelling and seeing the world. While familiarizing ourselves with places elsewhere, we might come to understand more about the places from which we depart. As Randy Malamud argues in *The Importance of Elsewhere* (2018), "I want to convey the complicated permeability of the categorizations that apply to the person who moves from point A to point B, from here to elsewhere, from familiar to foreign, from known to unknown" (13). I am interested in an

“indeterminate, fluctuating self-identity” (13) that pushes us to ask ourselves for whom does recognition and visibility matter to most during processes of adoption? And why do we still put so much stock into conceptions of a static identity when we acknowledge that processes of adapting to survive are as flexible as they are breakable and fragile?

Linda Hogan outlines the vacillating boundaries of fluid identity as Thomas undergoes both physiological and psychological transformation elsewhere. Abroad, and through what Jodi A. Byrd identifies as “Native transmotion,” Thomas travels by means of “survivance” (xvi) that connotes an ability to sustain and maintain existence even when not exactly visible. Gerald Vizenor coined the term survivance to articulate how “Native stories are the sources of survivance, the comprehension of natural reason, [and] tragic wisdom”; they are prompted by a “consciousness and sense of incontestable presence that arises from experiences in the natural world” (11). Thomas sees himself, as he must to survive, as a guest<sup>27</sup> in and of South Vietnam’s environment and makes adjustments accordingly in order to escape the ruins of war and even more so, establish a life via survivance. Vizenor elaborates that such acknowledgment of one’s presence and the conditions which have created it arise from “experiences in the natural world, by the turn of seasons, by sudden storms, by migration of cranes, by the ventures of tender lady’s slippers, by chance of moths overnight, by unruly mosquitoes, and by the favor of spirits in the water, rimy sumac, wild rice, thunder in the ice, bear, beaver, and faces in the stone” (11). In order to survive his displacement and desertion from the U.S. Army, Thomas follows natural reason that requires trusting one’s instincts. Trying to “decipher his vicinity,” Thomas registers that he is in “the South, somewhere on a river” and “finally [goes] by feeling” (170). At times, he

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<sup>27</sup> Daniel Heath Justice (2016) defines “guesthood” or being a guest in that in whatever space, geographically or otherwise one occupies, they should listen, learn, and walk gently so as not to hinder those who belong there in their work and in others’ maintaining and sometimes healing of ongoing relationships (26).

resorts to covering himself in mud, keeping himself “unseen, the insects away,” and he “wander[s] into mists not knowing what would be there, just feeling with a part of himself he’d never known as he entered darkness. His body had eyes. His back had eyes. His fingers had eyes. But so did the trees, the leaves, the moss and stone” (172). Operating instinctually, Thomas understands that to survive, he must actively engage a consciousness of self and connection with his natural and geographic environment (inclusive of people and places) through balancing visibility with vanishing, renunciation with resuscitation—the end of one life for the beginning of another.

Just how Thomas survives by natural reason, the nature of effectuate trauma, insidious yet ontologically unlocatable to other characters of the novel, abides by modes of motion that have the potential to restore equilibrium to his relationships. However, equilibrium, not synonymous with plot resolution, relies on the balance of transference affect that has the capacity to mold identity beyond recognition. In the novel, this balance involves agentic characters with particular narratives that require dialogical transparency to reconcile their diffractive traumas. In an attempt to placate Ruth’s grief, Thomas tells her, “I ran away from you. I never even asked for an explanation for anything. I never gave one. I just ran. From everything” (274). Ruth responds, saying that Thomas ran out of her and Marco’s lives, to which he attests, “No, really, I *fell* over the edge” (274). Thomas had abandoned Ruth and any obligations he had to a life in Dark River, and upon his return asks no one to explain the cards he’s been dealt. That Thomas feels he had fallen over the edge implies affect that thrusts him into motion that, by his own force, he cannot counteract. And such affect, characteristic of trauma diffracted from a catalyst of war, sends him careening elsewhere until it encounters an epistemological barrier. The novel’s plot reaches no absolute resolution through “balancing” or “undoing” the many streams of

character trauma—specifically Thomas’ moral and ethical wrongdoings—without heeding two conditions: 1) Thomas must (at least, ostensibly) die and 2) Thomas must exile himself to “elsewhere” so as to not come into contact with characters he potentially might harm.

It is this point of contact that allows two narrative identities to exist simultaneously while not restoring transference balance and recognition. While Thomas is in Vietnam, Ruth dreams about the conditions through which he navigates life without her. Ruth envisions vivid depictions of Thomas participating in acts of survivance. In the dreams, Ruth feels spiritually connected to Thomas in ways that she cannot connect with him in real life once he returns. Just as Thomas adopts a narrative identity of himself, Ruth analyzes her dreams to recognize an identity that cannot be fluidly transferred through actual interactions.

Hogan’s use of magical realism establishes a foundation to otherwise lenticular onto-epistemological productions of selfhood that become communicable in a third-space dreamscape. Ruth’s grievability is fortified upon turbulent grounds of multiple irreconcilable subjectivities that with “anger and sorrow [grow] together in her like a single tree” (36). However, when Ruth feels in her bones, and feels accurately that Thomas is alive, although this point signals the “end of laughter for a time” (36), Hogan typifies a trans-corporeal relationship between the two. Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman define trans-corporeality “as a theoretical site” or place “where corporeal theories and environmental theories meet and mingle in productive ways” (238). Alaimo and Hekman discuss the value and agency in amalgamating anthropocentric with ecocentric theories that I believe, in a close-reading of Ruth’s relationship to Thomas, function, too, as epistemological methodologies through relationships of “movement across human corporeality and nonhuman nature” (238). Trans-corporeal knowledge “necessitates rich, complex modes of analysis that travel through the entangled territories of material and



discursive, natural and cultural, biological and textual” (238) just as “the love between Thomas and Ruth was one that existed in another dimension” (Hogan 36).

Ruth’s persistent belief in an instinctual connection to Thomas’ survival transcends time and space. Her dreams provide her knowledge of Thomas’s location and the environment’s effects on his identity. Ruth sustains this intimate connection, unbeknownst to Thomas. She utilizes an onto-epistemological apparatus that intersects the metaphysical, heterotopological, and sociological. Ruth feels connected to him when witnessing the vignettes that communicate knowledge of his geographic location not accessible to other A’atsika people. She “sees through space and time across this world through her own eyes and heart” just as her “spirit never remained in the hiding place of her body,” always traveling (36). Her visions are “a wave that flow[s] from her bed on [her] boat and float[s] her out to the waters of another world” (38). These visions help Ruth surmise a familiar vestige of Thomas in a world away from hers. Ruth’s interpretation of dreams is also in itself an act of survivance, which produces a narrative identity she hopes to further comprehend. Ruth attempts to grasp the metaphysical to make sense of the material-physical and is able to see Thomas as he might see himself in a space where he operates to survive, not to be recognized. By analyzing her dreams, Ruth attempts to understand what Thomas faces in the “boundary between self and self that is crossed only in a world like this” (180).

Where acts of survivance are characterized by the active choice to recognize one as subject, not object, I am curious to examine the permanency and affect of choice as related to integration into the familial-nation form. As adoptees might reconcile their biological heritage with their relationship to their adoptive families, Thomas attempts to reconcile a narrative borne of a third space with a narrative identity that can exist in his spatio-temporal present. There are

two points of reference where Thomas chooses to participate in such redemptive acts: his trip to Washington D.C. to return military medals awarded to him and his participation in the novel's concluding whale hunt.

At the Pentagon, Thomas tells a major, "I want to return these. I want it noted that I am giving them back" (263). He proceeds to stress to the man in charge that he believes he didn't earn the medals, adding that he wasn't killed or missing and that he killed the wrong people (265). Without a desire to explain the honors attributed to being wounded in combat, Thomas states, "I killed Americans. It was supposed to be a raid. It went wrong. And we were in the wrong place. I tried to tell them. I had the map in my hand. And we were supposed to kill the children and I said no" (265). He professes that he attacked his platoon in defense of innocent Vietnamese children whom he believed his fellow soldiers would have killed. The official assures Thomas that the awards are rightfully, ethically his. However, Thomas pushes forth, hoping to be recognized for a truthful narrative rather than one of heroism projected unto him. Thomas admits that he left his dog tags at the site so that others would believe he had died, too; and that he had run away and didn't return home because he couldn't—it was his choice (265). The official assures Thomas that because the war is over, he can move on from the events, but Thomas continues:

I don't want them. The past doesn't rest. They were smoking dope, they were killing the people's pigs, they were plating land mines all around the place, killing innocent people. They shot at anything. The . . . cries, they were going to kill children. Rape and kill them. I looked at their faces. I looked at the children. I turned and shot them. There wasn't even a look of surprise on their faces. They weren't even that clear. I hate them. I hate myself. (265)

This catharsis is a pivotal point in the novel, Seeking peace and justice in returning the medals, Thomas consequently forces himself to renounce the narrative which he has built his third space identity. The tension between Thomas's desire to profess his truth and the official's impartiality shows how Thomas's adopted narrative is exactly that: one that is adopted for one purpose and adapted when necessary. As underlying cacophonous traumas are still in need of justice there, in the Pentagon's Department of the Army, Thomas begins a process of renunciation to reconcile and remedy the diffractive traumas that shape his present reality.

What this brings forth is Jerng's note that adoption narratives are "generally constructed as the necessity to preserve . . . ties to cultural, biological, or racial origin" (128). And "this desire for return has become a dominant narrative through which transracial and transnational adoptees have gained legibility and articulated their claims" (128–129). And "the self-other relationship is marked by a series of overlapping histories in which self and other are repeatedly being constructed through other relationships" (182). Thomas's adopting, adapting, and abandoning his self-condemnation narrative can be viewed through a diffractive lens that is parallel to patterns of the novel's traumas. As a result of existing in constant state of flux, Thomas propels himself from a narrative plagued by guilt and isolation and into a one of redemption that he otherwise would not be able to recognize. Although "Thomas still fails to see that sometimes there isn't justice, that the world is not one made up of black and white, right and wrong," he survives because of "knowing that zone of gray, of being in between, of sitting on the border between lies and half-truths, between the goodness of some and the evil of others" (272).

This is the crux of Thomas's internal conflict, upon his return. His self-condemnation narrative persisted because of his choice to believe that guilt must manifest as isolation from others and the previous life these others represent. Thomas fortifies a wall around his dwelling so

as to represent a “sectioning off” from those which do not recognize him and those he does not want to interact with. He works to preserve a third-space identity that can coexist within the familial-nation form but not as a part. However, because Thomas is native to Dark River, he is simultaneously apart from and a part of the community, whether he willfully decides to be or not.

I am inclined to believe this brings up inquiries into the importance of roots, and, how, perhaps no matter how far we travel, or what we turn into, we are always some version of the same self, biologically. The “universal” adoption narrative is universal for a reason, it appears. In this case, hybrid adopter-adoptee Thomas is compelled to renounce his adopted narrative identity through familial obligation that might also redeem himself. This, however, isn’t to argue that blood quantum<sup>28</sup> and biological makeup is the characteristic in itself that draws Thomas back to his A’atsika “roots.” This is to say that in the novel, Thomas’s preexistent history to the A’atsika familial-nation form and an ostensible opportunity at redemption overlap.

This overlap occurs when Thomas’s decides to participate in a traditional, sacred whale hunt. Thomas is the grandon of Thomas Witka Just, who is esteemed for his reverence to the A’atsika traditions. And Thomas, as a young boy, had exhibited gifted qualities that would make him the very person that the men would need on their hunt. Thomas chooses to reconcile with Ruth, seeing the hunt as an opportunity for him to renounce one narrative for another: one in which he would be remembered as a man of integrity and respect to a familial-nation tradition, rather than war, regret, and isolation. Ruth realizes this, “with her broken heart,” and surmises that Thomas “only came home to strengthen his identity” (82). And Ruth is not quite at fault

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<sup>28</sup> Thomas King’s *The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America* (2012) expounds upon U.S.–Indigenous relations in a rather unconventional yet holistic account. King notes that “Today, almost all Aboriginal Nations control their memberships. While the rules and regulations differ from tribe to tribe, band to band, the general requirement is that a blood relationship exist between a registered Indian or an ancestor on the tribal rolls and an individual seeking membership. Sometimes there is blood-quantum requirement as well” (29). The concept of blood quantum is surrounded by controversy on both spectrums of U.S.–Indigenous relations.

here. Thomas considers how by “killing the whale, as if being like his grandfather, Witka, would excuse his lies and actions, as if he could, in one act, save himself from one history and return to another” (70). He chooses to renounce a third-space identity for the very real stakes involved for the present spatio-temporal space he occupies.

In the frenzy of the first whale hunt Thomas takes part in upon his return, Thomas is one of the many men who shoot the whale, “except at the same time wondering, *Why?* Why am I doing this? He would later wonder, At which point could I have stopped myself?” (93). Once Thomas recognizes the consequences of his actions, he realizes that “it was because he had the rifle, a gun. It was the feel of it, of war. It was habit” (93). Thomas’s own actions “had reduced him, his memories ever inescapable” (119). A resurgence of muscle memory during the whale hunt signifies how Thomas's narrative, much like any of our own, isn’t relegated to mere choice. Thomas fires his gun and thinks, “Once again in my life, I fired, he thought, against my will. It was not by design but by habit, fear, adrenaline. Maybe even memory” (112). He still suffers from causal and effectuate trauma, which in this particular case manifests as muscle memory at the expense of Marco’s death.

In both of Thomas’s attempts at redemption, Hogan shows how resurgence, redemption, and resolution are not correlative throughout the novel. Thomas exhibits both a causal and effectuate origin of diffractive, cacophonous trauma that appears to perpetually interfere with the lives of those around him. As an Indigenous man put into motion by an American call to war, he represents countless Indigenous peoples whose individual selfhoods have been marred into motion by conditions not set by themselves and parameters not measured by their own means. As an individual attempting to reconcile a plurality of narrative identities, an entanglement of relationships, and familial-nation obligation to tradition, Thomas exhibits how trauma

disseminates far beyond an initial point of origin. Thomas's survivance, and his oscillating recognition, connotes Daniel Heath Justice's understanding of necessary guesthood among Indigenous communities: that "belonging is about more than privileges—it is about taking up the responsibilities and obligations of the people and the place" one occupies and is "less a matter of what we choose than what chooses us" (26), that "perhaps we do this by fully, carefully, and courageously placing ourselves in relationship, in community, in humility, in the mystery . . . separately, and together" (31). Through a lens of guesthood, Thomas must grapple with reaching for that which is right in front of him while also reaching into the space within himself that will allow him to choose what he already knows he must become.

#### 4 CONCLUSION

I believe that language and the very nature by which we come to know and name things, is, at its most benign, still political. And blood, like language, when scrutinized and studied under an ontological microscope, has a story. Stories connected through "blood," however, are often characterized by a centrifugal pull<sup>29</sup> that pushes one to look inward to examine one's self and out *there* to (re)connect with roots that connect one to others. For some, these "there" places are often topographically and biologically out of reach. Yet in a contemporary moment that allows DNA testing to "validate" cultural ownership through biology, I've found it more urgent to question not what "makes" family, but rather what sustains it: choice.

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<sup>29</sup> As I have discussed earlier, the internal and external conflicts beset from Thomas's adopted narrative of self-condemnation show what I believe are centrifugal, outside pulls due to choice. Thomas's adopted narrative operates with a dynamic similar to what cognitive psychologist Jerome Bruner identifies as a familial centrifugal pull. Jerng quotes Bruner to state how "families are systems for keeping people from being pulled centrifugally by inevitably conflicting interests" (217). This exemplifies how choice works in the familial-nation state. Choice is the "underlying obvious." Choice, which integrates or even reintegrates members together, must be always practiced in terms of adoption, yet the visibility of explicit choice and the stakes it involves fluctuate. See Jerome Bruner, *Acts of Meaning*. Cambridge, Harvard UP, 1990, 126.

If adopting a person means legitimizing family through legal processes of inclusion, I question whether *adopted* narratives should be viewed in the same light. In *People of the Whale* Thomas's adopted narrative identity asks us to pause and consider the importance of legitimizing not only the adoptee within the familial-nation form but also what constitutes a "proper" adoption narrative. If not notarized through papers—record-keepings of what is acquired and renounced—how does one validate the connection between the words *adapt* and *adopt*? What nuances get lost? What nuances emerge?

The comparison of the two is a step toward visibility through a diffractive exploration. And in the elsewhere between the two is where this project resides: where the personal and the academic speak to and through each other, interfering, overlapping, grappling with selfhood. It is in moments of hesitation, of wavering and re-assessing, I believe, that crystallize how the transnational adoptee is situated within the family-unit in both individual (personal) and collective (political) realms. And if the familial-nation form identifies family as a microcosm of a community unified in biological heritage and cultural mythos, then the transnational adoptee's inclusion, recognition, and validation within the family hinges upon choice. Like a self-sampling DNA kit, choice can verify and vilify the people and parameters who participate in the act of making family "look like real."<sup>30</sup> To be included and the reciprocative decision to include in an attempt to redefine family is a participatory act of unconditional love and care conferred by conditionality in itself. This often unspoken "condition" displaces, misplaces, and at times replaces aspects of the adoptee's identity that differentiates oneself from the familial-nation form in which they identify.

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<sup>30</sup> "Making Family 'Look like Real' is the title of the sixth chapter in *Claiming Others: Transracial Adoption and National Belonging* by Mark Jerng.

I've thought a good bit about the role choice plays in both adopted and adoption narratives. I've thought about its causal and effectuate nature, about how it can indeed beget something out of nothing. Although choice can be arbitrary, those whom it affects may encounter a series of consequential traumas that have been displaced over time. This relationship, as Mark Jerng states, is "not the ground but the fiction of permanence" (242).

I argue that Thomas's adopted narrative identity exhibits a pattern of diffractive trauma that seeks to validate identity upon the grounds of fiction. Thomas's adopted narrative, like more common conceptions of transnational adoption narratives, is in constant flux. Anthropologists Jessaca Leinaweaver and Sonja van Wichelen interrogate the "adoption-migration nexus" (500). They "examine the complex moral economies and spatial practices that sustain both international adoption and transnational migration" and do so by engaging three interrelated themes: (1) the adoption-migration nexus, (2) geographies of relatedness, and (3) the biopolitics of mobility (500). Although Leinaweaver and van Wichelen focus on experiences of children who are transnational adoptees, I believe this relationship also articulates an integral point to my project. Both physical-spatial and socio-personal interactions must traverse "elsewhere" via motion that recenters and reconstitutes the grounds of identity from which the subject initially recognizes oneself.

Leinaweaver and van Wichelen also note that "'places of origin' are central to the construction of 'culture' and 'home' and illuminate how 'places of origin' are made to matter, and not matter, for adoptees" (501). The authors explore the conditionality through which places of origin begin to matter for subjects whose identities are shaped in part by constant motion. Place is made to matter in *People of the Whale* because of Thomas's inherent Indigeneity. This "mattering" entails interrogating what is at stake when an identity cultivated through motion



cannot identify a place of origin in a single place. Thomas's experience with motion asks us to consider how an adopted narrative identity omits an onto-epistemological<sup>31</sup> relationship to "grounded normativity."<sup>32</sup> Glen Coulthard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson state how Indigenous people's "relationship to the land itself generates processes, practices, and knowledges that inform [Indigenous] political systems, and through which [they] *practice solidarity*" and "to willfully abandon them would amount to a form of auto-genocide" (254). Because Thomas's relationship to origins of trauma and identity recognition depends upon the choice to identify as a means to an end, his adopted narrative identity lacks grounded normativity that begets solidarity with a community rooted in place-based recognition. To Coulthard and Simpson's point, Thomas willfully abandons these unifying relationships, which results in what feels like a cessation of recognizable identity to these communities and their traditions.

However, I believe that *People of the Whale* distinguishes the significance between Thomas's onto-epistemological death with his physical one. When Ruth receives Thomas's dog tag, she faces what she believes is a physical death. This is one of three ways Hogan treats physical death: consequences of migration (the dog tags), adaptation (the adopted narrative identity), and rebirth (Thomas's actual death). The first two affect Thomas's loved ones as well

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<sup>31</sup> In *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, Karen Barad proposes an onto-epistemological framework that provides an understanding of the role of human *and* nonhuman, material *and* discursive, and natural *and* cultural factors in scientific and other social-material practices, thereby moving such considerations beyond the well-worn debates that pit constructivism against realism, agency against structure, and idealism against materialism" (26).

<sup>32</sup> In the article "Grounded Normativity / Place-Based Solidarity" (2016), Glen Coulthard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson argue, "What we are calling 'grounded normativity' refers to the ethical frameworks provided by these Indigenous place-based practices and associated forms of knowledge. Grounded normativity houses and reproduces the practices and procedures, based on deep reciprocity, that are inherently informed by an intimate relationship to place. Grounded normativity teaches us how to live our lives in relation to other people and nonhuman life forms in a profoundly nonauthoritarian, nondominating, nonexploitive manner. Grounded normativity teaches us how to be in respectful diplomatic relationships with other Indigenous and non-Indigenous nations with whom we might share territorial responsibilities or common political or economic interests" (254). For further elaboration, see Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*. Minneapolis, U of Minnesota P, 2014.

as their communities through cacophonous, diffractive trauma. This is further compounded when Thomas is found, in fact, to be alive. By returning to Dark River under the guise of his adopted narrative identity, notions of familiarity toward Thomas signify a death within the familial-nation form, which render him unrecognizable, although he has roots and obligations to the community. However, what I would like to now inquire into is how Thomas's actual death signifies a rebirth: how he is able to resurge into the A'atsika community, redeem himself, and be recognized by himself and others.

Thomas's first whale hunt when he returns to Dark River splays out a series of events that results in an unsuccessful, sacrilegious experience. The whale hunt is a potential point of redemption for Thomas. It is an opportunity to restore traditional values within the A'atsika community, as some community members attempt to exploit the sacred practice for broader public view. However, when Thomas shoots a whale out of sheer muscle memory, chaos ensues and Marco is murdered. It takes a second and final whale hunt for Thomas to attempt to make amends.

When Thomas is shot during the final whale hunt, he is finally stationary in both place and mind. His death is defined by Thomas's redemption and arguable (re)integration into society through a process that forces him to renounce his adopted narrative identity. Dwight, one of the A'atsika men on the boat, shoots Thomas and causes him to fall into the water. Dwight's shooting signifies the irony in Thomas's death, a reversal of expectations in light of Thomas's previous conflicts with muscle memory. Whether readers feel a sense of resolution with the circumstances of the death, the scene illuminates a paradoxical nature at redemption and (re)integration. Where Thomas may redeem himself through acts of renunciation, the novel portrays how he cannot (re)integrate into the A'atsika community through agency of his own.

Moreover, in order to (re)integrate, Thomas cannot exist physically within the community, but only in a collective memory. When he is shot, “at death, he feels, but doesn’t see, all those moments of the past, beautiful and terrible. His senses are awake” (287). In the water Thomas undergoes a spiritual-metaphysical transformation. In this moment, “he remembers even the unseen, the sweat of labor and love, the taste of salmon from the river, hears the songs of the ocean, the loved ones singing, smells the garden in the first of spring, the green sprouts, he feels the cool taste of something he can’t name, the sweetness and the physicality of the bending and working in the rice field.” (287) In this moment, Thomas cultivates a notion of grounded normativity by immersing himself in place absolutely. And during this metaphysical process, Thomas begins to understand how his experiences are interconnected and how memory brings him closer to a sense of community that he otherwise alive would have thwarted.

After he is shot, Thomas reawakens elsewhere: on an island with the “white houses” of the “old people.” The novel begins to play with an idea of time in which we are not entirely sure if Thomas is dead or alive. On the island, Thomas is transported away from the A’atsika community, healed and ostensibly revived by spiritual practices of the “old people.” When Thomas has “his spirit back and can sit up and his heart has been covered with something like bark, they all sit in silent council for days. He understands what is being said. This is the way it used to be. The speaking is done through the eyes and through the soul and heart” (291). Thomas “wakes up” or is rebirthed in a place that is immersed in tradition, much like he was engulfed in water, where communication and recognition are not constructed but instead intrinsically understood. In this deep sense of place, Thomas understands that “a person can feel what is considered. Intelligence is passed all around, knowledge is shared. Decisions are made this way, primal, primary. Stories are told” (291). In this instance, Thomas “is emptied of all his stories

and secrets, even his deeds, and one time he things, We keep nothing. What we are shows on our faces, our every move, our grasping, the way we consume others or ourselves (291). This experience grounds Thomas to place and represents a return to roots that revive a sense of self, allowing for reciprocative recognition.

Thomas's death includes an immersion into physical space and a return to culture that attests to how modes of transit and migration elsewhere do not solely prevent his (re)integration into A'atsika society. What hinders unification is an inability to communicate what is still potentially ungrievable. During the last chapter, the community grieves his death, which brings peace and solidarity. Ruth notes how Thomas "lives with the old people now, the "white house people" (300) and that "things would have been different if he was alive. There would still be fights among the tribe and now things have calmed down" (300). Ruth notes how Thomas's death frees himself and others from diffractive traumas that would continue to take place. In death, Thomas is recognized because he can be preserved in the memory of the people because of the circumstances of his death and not the narrative identity he adopts. When Thomas awakens on the island of the old people, the rest of the A'atsika people assume his death is final, real. They treat his death as such in order to heal the community, while he continues to heal himself in a place where he can remain unseen. He is "tired. Yes, he has shed a skin. He has worn it for years and he's had a weeping inside that only Ruth could hear when she was around it. It walked about with him like another person. Now there is silence, even peace, no more haunting (293). He awakens looking young, as if "he is newly born and so beautiful" (290). This rebirth signifies a "return" to identity: he has to restart and begin in a place where one gets one's bearings by learning its surroundings and thus learning itself.

The way *People of the Whale* portrays death, like its treatment of space and identity, emerges from a third space. To see “behind” water as a mirror, we must acknowledge that the surface exists upon the foundation of the ocean “beneath” it, connected “behind” it so much as it is connected to the air above it (or, relatively “behind” or beyond the surface). The surface both reflects and refracts light; one can see one’s reflection in surface water but only a contorted semblance of light within or beneath. In this respect, Lin sees herself in Thomas, by blood and physical features, but she “remembers only pieces of him. She calls them fractures” (207). However, just as the surface establishes a definitional boundary that distinguishes one form of matter, one force, from another—a space one can look *to*, it is a virtual space which one sees *through*. To see through surface water takes into account what may lie beneath, as the novel’s last chapter is titled “Stirrings Beneath.” Yet, this sight also applies to the perspective of seeing “behind” or beyond the surface from underneath it, looking up as one might see the sun, its beams dispersed and dancing above. And to catch glimpses of these vestiges—traces of life unexpected—swimming behind of our reflections, holds true to how even surfaces have “very deep and seemingly superimposed meanings” (6). Ruth can still see and interact with Thomas after his death: she recognizes a spirit that exists in the space between the dead and the alive.

What this book truly proposes, with an interrogation into the “stirrings underneath,” is to understand what emerges from the spaces we had never imagined to exist. This has everything to do with becoming our surroundings and acquiring modes of being that extend across political and physical third spaces and further into the personal. This idea of becoming, however, is an interwoven topological overlap, a palimpsest, where space and place, time, and modes of understanding them overlap. This is a story of the processes throughout our lives that do not first ask us, “where are you going?” in order to discern where we are. This is a story of encounters,

interactions, and counteractions. It is a journey about returning without ever being in just one place at one time.

The novel concludes with the line: “Some just say the spirit world searches for us. It wants us to listen” (301). In many ways, this speaks to how there are things that we cannot topologically locate that still yet compel us to do what we do, go where we go, and adapt in ways we must. And as within the familial-nation form, we must truly be still and listen. We must learn how to emerge yet not interfere, learn to be still, and still persist. To reach beyond the narratives we construct for ourselves, we can work toward recognition and validation through the very lens that we first learned to see ourselves. This way, we can and must grieve the ungrievable and avoid becoming a guest in our own skin. To emerge means to proceed onward: to heal, to search and, to find, always in a more diffracted light.



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